



71 Raymond Road
West Hartford, CT 06107
(860) 678-0005
www.theccic.org

Testimony for the
Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
Jennifer Widness, President
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
March 3, 2020

On behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, I am submitting testimony on two bills before you today on **S.B. 15: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION** and **H.B. 5353: AN ACT FUNDING THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM**.

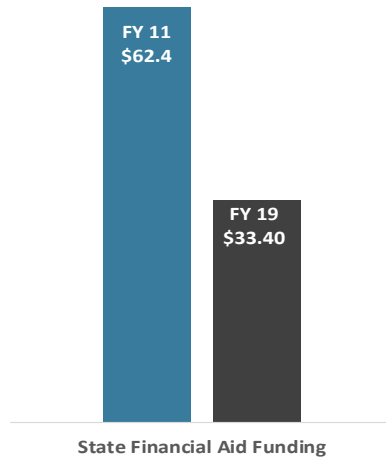
SB 15 narrows the eligibility requirements for the proposed Debt-Free Community College program authorized in 2019 to those students 1) with an estimated family contribution (EFC) of \$7,500 or below and 2) who graduated from high school within one year of enrolling. **H.B. 5353**, in contrast, makes no changes to the Debt-Free Community College program and requires that the legislature appropriate \$16 million for the Debt-Free Community College program passed last spring, which would allow for first-time, full-time students in Connecticut to attend community college tuition free, regardless of their ability to pay.

CCIC's member institutions certainly supports and shares the goals of the Debt-Free Community College program. Promoting access and affordability in higher education is critical to closing the equity gaps that exist in the state of Connecticut and ensuring we have the talent pipeline needed for our economy to grow.

However, we are concerned about a significant new investment of upwards of \$16 million for a program that does not take into account student need, student success or the workforce needs of the state:

- **Student Need:** State funding for need-based financial aid via the Roberts Willis Scholarship Program has been cut 46%, from a total investment of over \$60 million in FY 11 to \$33 million in FY 20. The unmet need in our state is significant: over 40,000 Connecticut students were *eligible* to receive the Roberta Willis Scholarship grant in FY 18 yet just over 11,000 grants were awarded.
- **Student Success:** [Connecticut's attainment gap](#) – the difference between the percentage of white and minority adults with post-secondary degrees – is the worst in the country. Incentivizing low-income students to enroll in Community Colleges, where student outcomes are [generally quite low](#), especially for minority students, will do little to close that gap.
- **Workforce Needs:** Significant attention has been given to the need to expand our state's talent pipeline to ensure we can meet the needs of the state's employers. McKinsey recently noted to the Governor's Workforce Council a significant mismatch in supply and demand in degree programs at ALL LEVELS in Health Sciences, Engineering and Computer Science. CCIC member institutions award more than half of the bachelor's degrees and above in these key areas. We must be part of any solution aimed at meeting our state's employer's talent needs.

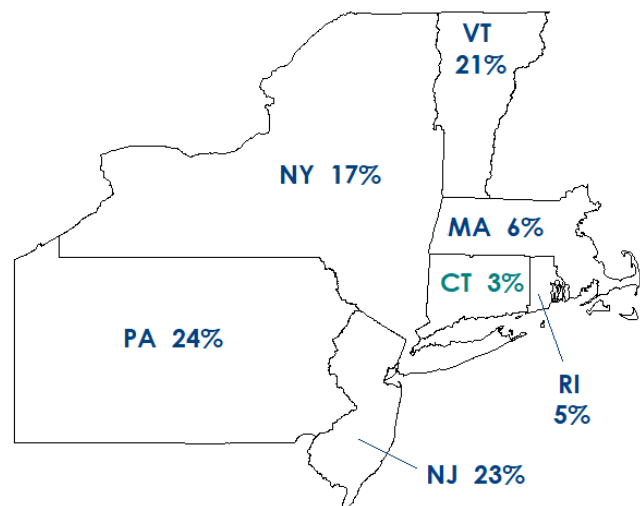
We would urge policymakers to consider these priorities as they move forward on these bills.



DRASTIC CUTS: Funding for state financial aid that provides need-based grants for CT students to attend CT higher education institutions has been cut **46%** since FY 11.

LAGGING OUR NEIGHBORS AND THE NATION:

41 other states in the U.S. spend a greater percentage of state funding for higher education on student aid than CT. CT is at the bottom among its neighbors.



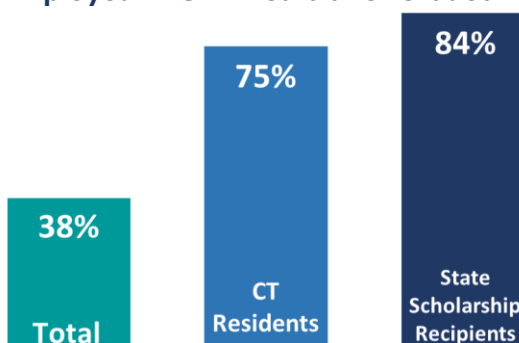
There is significant **UNMET NEED** among CT students in CT's higher education system:

41,463
 CT students were
ELIGIBLE for
 the RWSP Grant in FY 18



11,306
 CT students
RECEIVED a RWSP
 Grant that year

Graduates from CCIC Institutions found Employed in CT 2 Years after Graduation

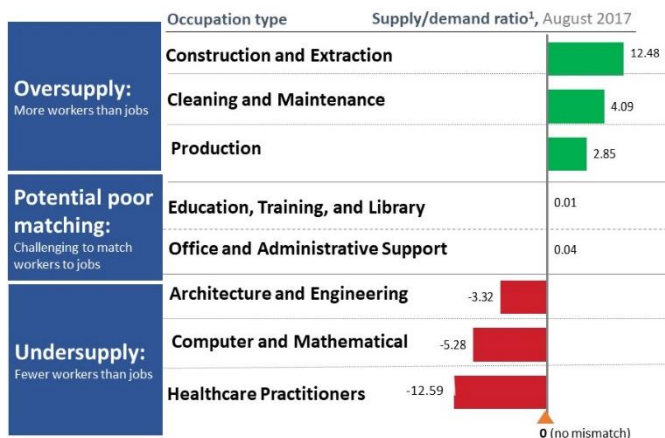
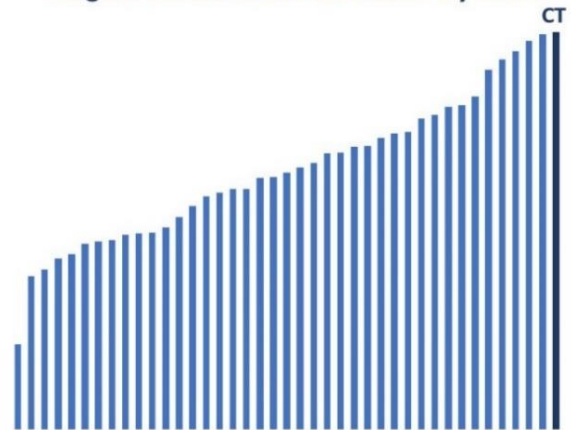


STRONG OUTCOMES: RWSP recipients at independent colleges complete at a higher rate than average, and data from P20 WIN finds over 80% working in state after college.

**SUPPORTING ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY IN
HIGHER EDUCATION IS CRITICAL TO CLOSE
THE EQUITY GAPS IN THE STATE.**

Connecticut's attainment gap – the difference between the percentage of white and African American adults with post-secondary degrees – is the worst in the country.

Percentage Point Gap in Black & White Degree Attainment for Adults by State



**JOBS REMAIN UNFILLED
BECAUSE OF AN UNDERSUPPLY
OF TALENT IN KEY AREAS.**

In 2017, McKinsey identified health sciences, Engineering and Computer Science as areas needing more workers.

CCIC MEMBER INSTITUTIONS award more than half of the bachelor's degrees and above in key industry fields.

Percent of Statewide Industry Cluster Degrees Awarded by Connecticut Independent Colleges in 2017-18: Bachelor's Degrees and Above

Source: IPEDS Data Center

